

## PART TWENTY-SEVEN

### THE STORY OF ABRAHAM: ABRAHAM AND LOT

(Gen., chs. 13, 14)

#### 1. *The Biblical Account (ch. 13)*

*And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South. 2 And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he went on his journeys from the South even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Ai, 4 unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah. 5 And Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. 7 And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and Perizzite dwelt then in the land. 8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren. 9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left. 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar. 11 So Lot chose him all the Plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against Jehovah exceedingly.*

14 And Jehovah said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward: 15 for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then may thy seed also be numbered. 17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it. 18 And Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built there an altar unto Jehovah.

## 2. The Separation from Lot

We now find Abram back at Bethel, "the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, unto the place of the altar"; and we are told that "there Abram called on the name of Jehovah." We have learned that this last statement means that he renewed the public worship of Yahweh on behalf of his household (retinue). It should be emphasized at this point that wherever Abram sojourned, there we find the altar, the sacrifice, and the priest (the patriarch himself), the elements of Biblical religion. It is impossible to harmonize this very important fact with the notion that Abram came out of Ur of the Chaldees contaminated by pagan idolatry. Abram and his household are now back at their second stopping-place after their entrance into the Promised Land.

At this point a matter of some significance takes place. "The land was not able to bear" the tents, flocks, and herds of both Abram and Lot. Hence, a separation became the feasible solution of the problem. Murphy (MG, 274, 275): "Lot has been hitherto kept in association with Abram by the ties of kinship. But it becomes gradually manifest that he has an independent interest, and is no longer disposed to follow the fortunes of the chosen

of God. In the natural course of things this under-feeling comes to the surface. Their serfs come into collision; and as Abram makes no claim of authority over Lot, he offers him the choice of a dwelling-place in the land. This issues in a peaceable separation in which Abram appears to great advantage. The chosen of the Lord is now in the course of providence isolated from all associations of kindred. He stands alone, in a strange land. . . . Lot now also abounds in the wealth of the East. Two opulent sheiks (elders, heads of houses) cannot dwell together any more. Their serfs come to strife. The carnal temper comes out among their dependents. Such disputes were unavoidable under the circumstances. Neither party had any title to the land. Landed property was not yet clearly defined or secured by law. The land therefore was a common, where everybody availed himself of the best spot for grazing he could find unoccupied. We can easily understand what facilities and temptations this would offer for the strong to overbear the weak. We meet with many incidental notices of such oppression (Gen. 21:25, 26:15-22; Exo. 2:16-19). The folly and impropriety of quarreling among kinsmen about pasture grounds on the present occasion is enhanced by the circumstances that Abram and Lot are mere strangers among the Kenaanites and the Perrizites, the settled occupants of the country. Custom had no doubt already given the possessor a prior claim. Abram and Lot were there merely on sufferance, because the country was thinly peopled, and many fertile spots were still unoccupied."

*Lot's Choice.* Note that "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld the Plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere. . . . So Lot chose him all the Plain of the Jordan," etc. Speiser (ABG, 98): "Having been orphaned early in his life (11:28), Lot was brought up first by his grandfather Terah (11:31). The task was then taken over by Abraham (12:5), who went on to treat his

nephew with unfailing solicitude and tenderness. Now the two must part, since each requires a large grazing and watering radius for his flocks and herds. Although the choice of territory rests with the older man, Abraham generously cedes this right to his ward. Nor does Lot fail to take advantage of this unforeseen opportunity. He picks the greener and richer portion. How was he to know what fate lay in store for Sodom and Gomorrah, or how glorious was to be the future of the rugged hill country to the west? The narrative ends thus on a note of gentle irony, the ever-present irony of history."

*Lot lifted up his eyes.* The spot where Abram and he were standing was the conspicuous hill between Bethel and Ai, from the top of which, according to travelers, they could see the Jordan, the broad grasslands on either bank, "and the waving verdure which marks the course of the stream." "The plain chosen was situated in, or at least included, the tract to the south of the Dead Sea, where at that time there were copious springs and an abundance of sweet water." It is surely obvious that Lot was looking out for "number one," as we say in American slang. Jamieson (CECG, 134): *In re* Lot's choice: A choice excellent from a worldly point of view, but most inexpedient for his best interests. He seems, though a good man, to have been too much under the influence of a selfish and covetous spirit; and how many, alas! imperil the good of their souls for the prospect of worldly advantage." Lange (CDHCG, 398): "It is the vale of Siddim (14:3), the present region of the Dead Sea, which is here intended. That the lower valley of the Jordan was peculiarly well-watered, and a rich pasture region, is expressed by a twofold comparison: it was as Paradise, and as the land of Egypt. The lower plain of the Jordan was glorious as the vanished glory of Paradise, or as the rich plains of the Nile in Egypt, which were still fresh in the memory of Lot." The land was watered not by trenches and canals (irrigation) but by

copious streams along its course, descending chiefly from the mountains of Moab. Leupold (EG, 430): "The separation from Lot is a necessity growing out of deeper reasons than those usually cited. Lot is an element that is not suited to be an integral part of the chosen people, as his later deterioration shows. Circumstances soon arise which make it eminently desirable to remove this unsuitable material as early as possible. Behind the outward separation lies a deeper motivation. At the same time, the incident has always served in the church as a typical case of how to deal in a practical way with the problem of incompatibility. If persons simply cannot get along together, nothing is gained by attempting to force the issue or by discussing the point until a solution is reached. Incompatibility is best dealt with by separation: let those that cannot agree get out of one another's way. To Ambrose is attributed the saying, *divide ut meneat amicitia*, a procedure which does not merit the criticism, 'a wretched but practicable rule' (Delitzsch)."

*The Plain of the Jordan*, literally, the circle or circuit of the Jordan, that is, at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Leupold (EG, 437): "It is not the whole basin of the Jordan from the Lake of Gennesareth to the Dead Sea, but only that portion which extends from about Jericho down to and including the northern end of the Dead Sea to Zoar. . . . Now when Moses reminds us that this region was so attractive 'before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah,' he clearly implies that in his time the region was sadly altered. One question will perhaps never be determined at this point and that is how far the devastating effects of the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah affected the rest of the Dead Sea region. Some hold that the Bible indicates that the entire Dead Sea is the result of that cataclysmic overthrow. We personally believe that indeed only the southern shallow end of the Dead Sea became covered with water as a result of the overthrow of these

cities, as also Kyle's investigations, seem to substantiate. But at the same time it appears that more or less of a blight settled upon the whole *kikkar*. For the author goes on to describe that it once was as 'the garden of Yahweh,' by which he must mean the garden of Eden which was in a special sense Yahweh's handiwork. The comparison must have been suitable, else Moses would not have used it. It is true that, nevertheless, the simile is a bit strong. Consequently, it is toned down by a second simile that has a fine propriety about it from another point of view: 'as the land of Egypt.' . . . The special propriety of this latter simile lies in this, that the region is like Egypt in that a deeper lying river winds through a fertile plain enclosed by mountains of either side." See Gen. 14:3, 8, 10, also (JB, 29, n.): "The author imagines the Dead Sea as not yet in existence; or else the Valley of Siddim (the name is not met with elsewhere) occupied only what is now the southern part of the Dead Sea, a depression of relatively recent formation."

V. 12, K.J.V. The old version is so much more forceful here: "Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom." What tragedy lay in this last statement, as strongly intimated in v. 13! Cf. JB (29): "Lot chooses a life of ease and a region where immorality flourishes; for this he will be heavily punished, ch. 19. But the generosity of Abraham in leaving his nephew the choice is to be rewarded by a renewal of the promise of 12:7." The choice of this present world above God inevitably leads to Divine judgment, just as it did when *Lot chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom* (18:20-21, 19:4-11).

*Abram's Reward* (vv. 14-18). Smith-Fields (OTH, 69, 70): Abram "now began to feel the evils of prosperity. The land could not support his own cattle and Lot's. Their herdsmen quarreled, and Lot probably put forward his rights as head of the family. Abram's faith did not fail this time. Remembering that he was 'the heir of better

promises,' he gave the choice of present good to Lot. Their encampment looked westward on the rugged hills of Judea and eastward on the fertile plain of the Jordan about Sodom, 'well watered everywhere, as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt' he had only lately left. Even from that distance, through the clear air of Palestine, can be distinctly seen the long and thick masses of vegetation which fringe the numerous streams that descend from the hills on either side to meet the central stream in its tropical depths. It was exactly the prospect to tempt a man who had no fixed purpose of his own, who had not like Abram obeyed the stern call of duty. So Lot left his uncle on the barren hills of Bethel, and chose all the precinct of the Jordan, and journeyed east. Abram received his reward in a *third blessing and promise* from Jehovah, who bade him lift up his eyes and scan the whole land on every side, for it should be the possession of his seed, and they should be unnumbered as the dust of the earth." Yahweh also enjoins him to walk over his inheritance, and to contemplate it in all its extent, with the repeated assurance that it will be his. "To be understood not as a literal direction, but as an intimation that he might leisurely survey his inheritance with the calm assurance that it was his" (PCG, 200). V. 15—Leupold (EG, 441): "True, Abram becomes possessor only in his seed. But such possession is none the less real." It is none the less real simply because it is guaranteed by God, who is the Owner of all things (Psa. 24:1, 50:12; 1 Cor. 10:26): and only He could give a completely clear title to any human being.

### 3. *Abram's Third Altar: from Bethel to Mamre.*

(Bethel became especially conspicuous in the time of Jacob (Gen. 28:11-22, 31:13, 35:1-15). It was allotted to the tribe of Ephraim later (1 Chron. 7:28) and bordered the territory of Benjamin (Josh. 18:13). The Israelites resettled the town calling it by the name Jacob had given to the scene in his vision, instead of the name Luz which

it apparently bore at the time of the Conquest (Judg. 1:23). It became a sanctuary in the time of Samuel who visited it annually (1 Sam. 7:16, 10:3): this means undoubtedly that it was a center of the "school" of the prophets (1 Sam. 7:16-17, 10:5-11, 19:18-20; 2 Ki. 2:1-3), the famous line which originated with Samuel and culminated in John the Immerser. The name *Bethel* means "house of God."). HSB (23): "The strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot represents the first threat to the promise of God that Abraham would possess the land. Abraham lived above this threat in faith, and his gracious attitude toward Lot was rewarded by another confirmation of the promise of God." (Cf. 13:14-17, also ch. 15). Thus encouraged, the Friend of God (Jas. 2:23) pulled up stakes again and traveling southward took up his abode (tent) under the spreading "oaks" of Mamre, named after an Amorite prince, with whom and his brothers Eschol and Aner, the patriarch later formed an alliance for the purpose of rescuing Lot, 14:13, 24. The place was near Hebron, a town of great antiquity, having been built seven years before Tanis in Egypt (Num. 13:22; cf. Exo. 6:18), which seems to have been known also at this time as Kiriath-Arba, "city of Arba," from Arba, the father of Anak and the ancestor of the giant Anakim (Gen. 23:2, 35:27; Josh. 14:13-15, 15:13-14, 21:10-12). Evidently on being taken by Caleb it recovered its ancient name (Josh. 14:13-15). The town is some twenty miles south of Jerusalem and a like distance north of Beersheba. It became the burial place of Abraham and his family in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23:19, 25:9, 49:29-33); from this circumstance the place is revered by the Mohammedans who call it *El-Khalil*, "The Friend," i.e., the Friend of God, the name which they give to Abraham. David first reigned as king in Hebron, and here, too Absalom began his tragic revolt (2 Sam. 5:1-5, 15:7-12). It will thus be seen that Hebron had a long and varied



history, under several masters: first, in all likelihood, a Shemite, then the Amorites (Gen. 14:13), then the Hittites (Gen. 23:10-20, 25:9), then the Anakim (Num. 13:22, 28; Josh. 14:13-15, 15:13-14), then Judah, and lastly the Mohammedans. Hebron became Abraham's more or less settled abode throughout the rest of his life. *There Abram built his third altar.* "A third altar is here built by Abram. His wandering course requires a varying place of worship. It is the Omnipresent whom he adores. The previous visits of the Lord had completed the restoration of his inward peace, security, and liberty of access to God, which had been disturbed by his descent into Egypt, and the temptation that had overcome him there. He feels himself again at peace with God, and his fortitude is renewed. He grows in spiritual knowledge and practice under the great Teacher" (MG, 278). Lot in the meantime has not only pitched his tent toward Sodom, but evidently has moved on into the city itself.

#### 4. *The Biblical Account (ch. 14).*

*And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, 2 that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar). 3 All these joined together in the vale of Siddim (the same is the Salt Sea). 4 Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5 And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaim in Ashterothkarnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shavehkiriathaim, 6 and the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness. 7 And they returned, and came to Enmishpat (the same is Kadesh), and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazazon-*

tamar. 8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar); and they set the battle in array against them in the vale of Siddim; 9 against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings against the five. 10 Now the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there, and they that remained fled to the mountain. 11 And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. 12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew: now he dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner; and these were confederate with Abram. 14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan. 15 And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobab, which is on the left hand of Damascus. 16 And he brought back all the goods and also brought back his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, at the vale of Shaveh (the same is the King's Vale). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth: 20 and blessed be God Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all. 21 And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the

persons, and take the goods to thyself. 22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand unto Jehovah, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet nor ought that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: 24 save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men that went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

5. *The Battle of the Kings (vv. 1-12).*

*The Cities of the Plain.* Lot, we are told, dwelt in the Cities of the Plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom: *i.e.*, evidently he moved into Sodom itself. These cities were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (afterward called Zoar). They were located in what is now the southern part of the Dead Sea below the tongue of land known as the Lisan which protrudes from its eastern shore. (BBA, 57): "Fresh water streams flowing down from the mountains of Moab made possible culture in this area in the days of Lot. In subsequent years, however, a great change took place. Evidence indicates that an earthquake struck the area about 1900 B.C. The petroleum and the gases of the region helped produce a conflagration which totally obliterated the Cities of the Plain. The Sodom which Lot knew, however, was one of wealth and luxury which seemed to be excellent prey for an army bent on plunder. Copper mining was carried on in the area between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba in ancient times, and the Cities of the Plain may have controlled these mines. The invaders from the East were initially successful in securing tribute from this wealthy area." Each of these cities had its own king, and Sodom seems to have been the chief city. Their wickedness was so great that Sodom gave its name to sins (largely of sex perversion, cf. Rom. 1:18-32) of which the infamous record persists down to our own time: they were willing

victims of the vilest of passions, both sexes changing "the natural use into that which is against nature" (Gen. 13:13, 18:20, 19:5; Deut. 23:17; Rom. 1:26-27; 2 Pet. 2:7-8). Apparently at the very outset Lot turned to this environment because "the quiet tenor of a godly life in the company of Abram was not sufficiently attractive for him: he craved the diversions and the excitement offered by city life." Of course Lot may not have shared their sins; indeed we are told explicitly that he was distressed by the lasciviousness and violence which prevailed on every hand; nevertheless it would seem that a truly godly man would have, from the very first, shunned such associations. The lesson to be derived from Lot's defection is realistic, namely, that *what happened to Lot happens to every man who pitches his tent toward Sodom.*

*The Invasion from the East* (vv. 1-12). Destructive literary criticism of the Bible treats this story of the Battle of the Kings more or less contemptuously. For example, the following comment (JB, p. 29, n.): "This chapter does not belong to any of the three great sources of Genesis. Behind it lies a document of great age which has been touched up so as to give greater prominence to Abraham, extolling his bravery and selflessness and calling attention to his connection with Jerusalem. The episode is not improbable provided we understand the campaign as an expedition to clear the caravan route to the Red Sea and Abraham's part in it as a raid on the rear of a column laden with booty. But the narrative does not help to place Abraham historically because the persons mentioned cannot be identified: Amraphel is not, as is often asserted, the famous king of Babylon, Hammurabi. All we can say is that the narrative finds its most natural setting in the conditions of the 19th century B.C." Morgenstern calls the entire chapter a *midrash* (i.e., an explanation of Hebrew Scripture dating from between the 4th century B.C., and the 11th century of the Christian era), composed to

glorify Abraham. The campaign described in vv. 1-10, he says, is that of powerful kings against revolting cities and strange lands. But in vv. 11-24, it is a Bedouin raid on two not overly powerful cities. The story is comparable to the Midianite raids in the Gideon story (Judg., chs. 6 ff.), and the raid of the Amalekites on unprotected Ziklag in David's absence: "the story of David's pursuit and recovery of stolen persons and goods parallels in almost every detail the story of Abraham's pursuit and recovery," etc. This writer dismisses the entire narrative as the account of a Bedouin raid in which Lot was captured with other prisoners and other booty of Sodom. Abraham, with the help of Aner, Eschol, and Mamre pursue. The enemy is not overtaken until they reach the vicinity of Dan, far to the north; feeling themselves outside enemy territory, they proceed more leisurely, to enjoy the booty. This enables Abraham to overtake them and recapture Lot and the booty as a result of their unpreparedness and surprise by night. Vv. 18-20 most critics hold to be post-Exilic, a few as pre-Exilic. So argues Morgenstern ("Genesis 14," SJL, see also in his JIBG). In IBG (590) we read: "This narrative is an isolated unit belonging to none of the main documents of the Hexateuch, and comes from an age which 'admires military glory all the more because it can conduct no wars itself, . . . an age in which, in spite of certain historical erudition, the historic sense of Judaism had sunk almost to zero.'" (cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 288-290, and Skinner, ICCG, pp. 271-276).

Evidences cited of the alleged "unhistorical" character of this tale may be listed as follows (1) The "representation that four great rulers of the east themselves moved westward to curb the revolt of five petty kings in Palestine (vv. 5-9) and that they came by the circuitous route outlined in vss. 5-7." But, cf. Leupold (EG, 451): "All manner of fault has been found with this route taken by Chedorlaomer. Because the reason for it is not given in

this brief account, the critics feel they may with impunity make light of any explanation that we may offer, as though it must needs be trivial. Again and again a very reasonable explanation has been suggested to them, only to be brushed aside. The simplest of all explanations is that the army coming from the east wanted to eliminate the possibility of an attack from the rear by unfriendly groups. These unfriendly groups were either unsubdued opponents or subjugated opponents known to be restive and inclined to side with other revolters. The author of our chapter is not under necessity of giving a full account of all that transpires and of the motives behind every act. For the building-up of the narrative, what is related is very effective. It shows the line being drawn closer and closer about Sodom and Gomorrah. We are made to sense the apprehension of the revolting cities; and they turn around from point to point as reports come pouring in about the defeat of the groups being attacked." As for the incentive that prompted four great rulers from the east to quash the revolt of five petty kings in Palestine, the explanation is clearly provided by recent archaeological discovery of metallurgical activities in the area involved. Kraeling (BA, 67): "Chedorlaomer and his vassal kings are said to have made war on the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and allied cities. Until very recently that seemed hard to understand, but the discovery that copper mining was anciently carried on in the region between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah has put a new face on the matter. Babylonian and Elamite rulers in particular had a problem on their hands to obtain metals, as well as wool. If Sodom and Gomorrah lay southeast of the Dead Sea these towns could well have controlled the mines of *el'Arabah*, so that an expedition from Mesopotamia to seize the mines would in popular reporting assume the form of a campaign against these places." Again: "The invaders came through Gilead to Moab and Edom. Recent explorations by Glueck have

established that there was a line of Bronze Age cities running down through this region. Several such are mentioned as being subjected (Gen. 14:5-6). The places referred to can be identified with considerable certainty." The plain fact is that copper mining was carried on in the region between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah and the Cities of the Plain may have controlled these mining operations. "The invaders from the East were initially successful in securing tribute from this wealthy area." When after twelve years this tribute was refused by the revolting cities, it became necessary for the original invaders to reimpose their demands on them—hence a second invasion occurred for the purpose of bringing the rebels to time. In the light of these facts the narrative is entirely plausible. HSB (24): "The fact that the four eastern kings devastated the area from Transjordan down to Kadesh-Barnea is borne out by Glueck's findings that sedentary culture in Transjordanian ceased about the 20th century B.C."

(2) "The representation that Abram with 318 retainers defeated the combined armies of the eastern kings (vss. 14-16)." But Speiser comments (ABG, 104): "The number involved is not too small for a surprise attack; by the same token it enhances the authenticity of the narrative." Also Whitelaw (PCG, 206): "servants, *born in his house, i.e.*, the children of his own patriarchal family, and neither purchased nor taken in war—*three hundred and eighteen*—which implied a household of probably a thousand souls." Jamieson (CECG, 140): "Those trained servants who are described as 'young men' (v. 24) were domestic slaves such as are common in Eastern countries still, and are considered and treated as members of the family. If Abram could spare three hundred and eighteen slaves, and leave a sufficient number to take care of his flocks, what a large establishment he must have had!" Cf. Haley (ADB, 319): "Abrahām had not *alone* routed the combined forces of the kings. His 'confederates,' Aner,

Eshcol, and Mamre, may have contributed much the larger portion of the victorious army." (Leupold translates this, "these were bound by covenant to Abram." This would indicate an agreement that guaranteed a close relationship.) These facts seem to be indicated in vv. 23-24: it is difficult to see how intelligent men could have ignored them. But again we are told that "nowhere else in the tradition is Abraham represented as living in such state;" that "in ch. 23, for instance, he is a lone stranger among the Hittite inhabitants of Kiriath-arba." The fact remains, however, that when Abram left the East, he was accompanied by "all the souls they had gotten in Haran" (12:5). This refers to all the bondservants he had gotten during his stay there. Where there is a large stock of cattle, there must be an adequate number of servants to attend them. Abraham and Lot entered Canaan as men of considerable substance. Moreover, Gen. 12:16 and 13:2 indicate that they came out of Egypt with a much greater retinue. (Cf. also 18:19 and 24:1). The argument that Abram was a "lone stranger" among the Hittites of Kiriath-arba is an argument from silence and does not harmonize with the tenor of the entire story of his first ventures in Canaan. Critics rely too much on assumption (or presumptions) to validate their views, assumptions which, obviously are not Scripturally justified: a fault stemming apparently from their innate (or academically generated) "inability to see the forest for the trees."

(3) "The representation that the Dead Sea was not yet in existence (cf. 13:10)." It is admitted that the words in v. 3, that is, *the Salt Sea*, may be a gloss and so may not reflect accurately the thought of the original writer" (See IBG, 590). But recent archaeological evidence supports the use of this name as an integral part of the original narrative. The *Salt Sea* is the name by which the Dead Sea is commonly designated in the Pentateuch and in the book of Joshua (Num. 34:3, Deut. 3:17; Josh. 3:16, 15:2, 5).



Jamieson (CECG, 137): "It is pre-eminently entitled to be called 'the salt sea,' for it is impregnated with saline qualities far beyond other seas." It is must noted that it is not the entire Dead Sea as we know it that is designated here, but only that part in which the Vale of Siddim was located. The Valley of Siddim, writes Speiser (ABG, 101), is "apparently the authentic name of the area at the southern end of the Dead Sea, which was later submerged." Cf. BBA (56-57): The Cities of the Plain "were located in what is now the southern portion of the Dead Sea below the tongue of land known as the Lisan which protrudes from its eastern shore. . . . Evidence indicates that an earthquake struck the area about 1900 B.C. The petroleum and gases of the region helped produce a conflagration which totally obliterated the Cities of the Plain." Cf. NBD (299): "The concentrated chemical deposits (salt, potash, magnesium, and calcium chlorides and bromide, 25 per cent of the water), which give the Dead Sea is buoyancy and its fatal effects on fish, may well have been ignited during an earthquake and caused the rain of brimstone and fire destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . Archaeological evidence suggests a break of several centuries in the sedentary occupation from early in the second millenium B.C. A hill of salt (*Jebel Usdum*, Mt. Sodom) at the southwest corner is eroded into strange forms, including pillars which are shown as 'Lot's Wife' by local Arabs. (Cf. Wisdom x. 7). Salt was obtained from the shore (Ezek. 47:11), and the Nabateans traded in the bitumen which floats on the surface." (cf. 14:10, 19:23-28). Kraeling contributes like evidence (BA, 68): "'Vale of Siddim' is apparently a name for the district at the south end of the Dead Sea. It is described as full of slime pits (R.S.V., bitumen pits), which proved disastrous for the fleeing defenders (cf. v. 10). We have previously noted that the Dead Sea at times spews up some bitumen or asphalt. Whether there originally were asphalt pits or

wells to the south of it is not yet known. But Glueck happened on lumps of asphalt on the shore south of Engedi in 1953, and describes it as a wonderfully lucky find which may not have been made a day earlier or later. In the last century alone the waters have risen six and one-half feet or more, so that the southern Dead Sea basin has been enlarged by one-third and considerable land has been put under water." Note here summarization in JB (29): "The author imagines the Dead Sea as not yet in existence, cf. 13:10; or else the Valley of Siddim (the name is not met with elsewhere) occupied only what is now the southern part of the Dead Sea, a depression of relatively recent formation." From evidence presented above the latter view is obviously the correct one.

*The Eastern Kings* (14:1, 9). *Amraphel*, king of Shinar. Shinar, is, of course, Babylonia, in the Old Testament. It is customary to identify Amraphel with the famous Hammurabi, but the identification is said to be "far from convincing." Hegemony of Elam over Babylonia under a king Kudur-Mabug existed before the time of Hammurabi, but on the accepted identification of Shinar with Babylonia, there is still no king-name in the list of Babylonian rulers that is as comparable to "Amraphel" as that of Hammurabi (Khammurapi). "Further speculation is unprofitable until the history of Hammurabi's time is better known." *Arioch* is certainly comparable to Eri-Aku whom some identify with Rim-Sin, King of Larsa (cf. "Ellasar"), an old Babylonian city on the Lower Euphrates. (Rim-Sin, ruler of the Larsa Dynasty whom Hammurabi overthrew, was a son and appointee of Kudur-Mabug, king of Elam.) Some fresh light is thrown upon this name "Arioch" from letters to King Zimri-lim of Mari (1700) which mention a certain *Arriyuk*, evidently a vassal, who calls himself that ruler's "son." *Tidal* is a name comparable to that of certain Hittite kings, namely, *Tudkhalia*, who flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries B.C. "Goiim" may simply mean "nations." It is doubtful whether it designates here a special nation or an aggregation of tribes. Could "Goiim" be an error for "Khittim" (Hittites)? *Chedorlaomer*, king of Elam, was the leader of this group of invaders; in all likelihood the other three were little more than "stooges" who accepted the overlordship of the King of Elam, who, because of the lacunae in the listing of early Elam rulers, has not yet been identified. We know, of course, that the Elamites, who occupied the territory east of the Tigris, were Indo-European. However, the political history of this period is such as to have made the account of a coalition of Elamites and West Semites entirely feasible. It seems clear from the narrative here that Chedorlaomer was the acknowledged commander-in-chief of this marauding expedition.

The Eastern kings made war, we are told, with the kings of the Cities of the Plain, namely, the rulers of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (or Zoar). (Cf. Gen. 19; Deut. 29:33; Hos. 11:8). The forces were joined in battle in the Vale of Siddim (see above) in which the kings of the East were triumphant, reducing the vanquished to tribute-paying states. After paying tribute for twelve years, however, the Cities of the Plain rebelled; and in the fourteenth year the kings from the East returned to the attack, again under the leadership of Chedorlaomer. As described above, they came—from somewhere on the Euphrates—down by way of Gilead through Transjordan (east of Jordan) where they "smote" what appear to have been the remnants of prehistoric and early historic peoples, namely: (1) the *Rephaim*, evidently a prehistoric people of gigantic stature (Gen. 15:20; Deut. 2:11, 3:11; Josh. 12:4, 13:12; 1 Sam. 17:23-27; 2 Sam. 21:16-22; 1 Chron. 20:4-8; Num. 13:30-33; Deut. 2:20-21). Speiser (ABG, 102): "It is worth noting that elsewhere this element is identified as pre-Israelite, which accords well

with the indicated early date of the present account." Note that the Rephaim dwelt in the twin cities of Ash-taroth and Karnaim, east of the Sea of Galilee. (2) The *Zuzim* (evidently the *Zemzimmim* of Deut. 2:20), the name of a giant pre-Ammonite people who were dispossessed by the Ammonites. The site of their town, Ham, is unknown today. (3) The *Emim*, who also dwelt east of the Dead Sea and who were, according to Deut. 2:10-11, fore-runners of the Moabites. (4) Note also the *Anakim* (accounted Rephaim, Deut. 2:10-11), who dwelt south of Jerusalem around Hebron (Josh. 15:8, 13, 14), who were displaced by the Israelites (Josh. 11:21-22, 15:14), the people who are said to have made the Israelites look like grasshoppers (Num. 13:33, cf. Gen. 6:4). Some have said that the name "Anakim" meant "the long-necked ones." (The Anakim are mentioned in the Torah as belonging to the Rephaim; however, they are not mentioned in the story of Chedorlaomer's invasion.) Chedorlaomer and his allies moved southward "smiting" and looting other peoples who were not actually Rephaim but are named here in connection with them, namely: (1) The *Horites* (Hurrians), original inhabitants of Mt. Seir (Gen. 14:6), who were displaced by the Edomites (Deut. 2:12, 22). Some authorities hold that "Horite" is the name used to designate two unrelated groups: the non-Semitic Hurrians (LXX, 34:3; also Josh. 9:7) and the Semitic predecessors of Seir Edom (Gen. 36:20, Deut. 12, 22, as in Gen. 14:6). (See ABG, 102). Seir was the name of the "mountain mass" of Edom, south of the Dead Sea and extending down the dry desert Arabah rift to the head of the Gulf of Aqabah (Deut. 2:1, 33:2). The Edomites were the descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:8, Josh. 24:4). Yet chieftains of the Horites were designated the children of Seir in the land of Edom (Gen. 36:21, 30; cf. Ezek. 35:2 ff.). These Horites (Gen. 14:6) non-Semitic Hurrians who invaded N. Mesopotamia and spread over Palestine and Syria in

the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C. (Cf. Gen. 32:3, 36:20 f.; Deut. 2:1-29; Josh. 24:4; 1 Chron. 4:42 ff.). (2) The *Amalekites*, traditional enemies of Israel (Exo. 17:8-16, Deut. 25:17-19, 1 Sam., chs. 15 and 30). (3) The *Amorites*, early occupants of Syria and Palestine; in the third millenium B.C. this region was designated by Babylonian records "the land of the Amorites." Hammurabi conquered Mari, the Amorite capital, in the 17th century B.C. They are listed with the families occupying Canaan in Gen. 10:15 ff. *Hazazon-tamar*, v. 7, is identified with Engedi, on the west shore of the Dead Sea (2 Chron. 20:2). The Eastern invaders apparently made a wide turn to the right before starting homeward. *En-mishpat* is positively identified here with Kadesh Barnea, the famous stopping-place of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings. It will thus be seen that El-paran marked the farthest point reached, for, after reaching it, the invaders "returned" ("turned back") in the direction of En-mishpat.

*The Battle—and Disaster* (vv. 8-12). The kings of the Cities of the Plain now joined battle with the Eastern allies in the Vale of Siddim. Leupold (EG, 455): "That the kings of the Dead Sea region did not turn out sooner to encounter the foe of whose approach they had long been aware, indicates either lack of ability and enterprise, or lack of courage, or, perhaps, the illusory hope on their part that their enemies would not venture against them. It seems most in harmony with the facts of the case to argue that the debauched mode of life characteristic of this group had debased their courage so that they only took up arms when actually compelled to and then put up but a pitiable defense." It should be noted that Sodom is mentioned first in the list of the Cities of the Plain (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela); this indicates that the king of Sodom was the leader of the defense forces and that Sodom itself was the most powerful city in

this alliance. The result was complete disaster for the defending forces. (See *supra* for the Valley of Siddim and its slime pits, that is, bitumen pits, evidently "wells of liquid pitch oozing from the earth." Note Isaiah's vision of the Day of the Lord (34:9), as the time when the land should be turned to burning pitch.) The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and "they fell there." Does this mean that they died there? Evidently not (cf. v. 17). Speiser (ABG, 102): "*Flung themselves*: literally 'fell'; but the Hebrew stem (npl) often carries a reflexive connotation, notably in the phrase 'to fall on one's neck' (33:4, 45:14, 46:29), which describes a voluntary act: see also 17:3." Leupold (EG, 456), noting the indication in v. 17 that the king of Sodom was still living, "a new king of Sodom could hardly be met with so soon, for opportunity for the choice of one had hardly been given. But this verb *naphal* may mean 'to get down hastily' (cf. 24:64). So we have the somewhat disgraceful situation of a number of defeated kings crawling into bitumen pits, and their defeated army taking refuge in the mountains." Certainly this explanation is in accord with the generally unenviable role which these kings played in this entire encounter. The victors, of course, ravaged the towns, seized all the booty that could be transported readily, the women and children (no doubt with the intention of making slaves of them), and carried away Lot and his family among the captives. The narrative goes on to explain that Lot now "dwelt in Sodom." Obviously, Abraham's nephew had taken up residence in the city itself (by now he had pitched his tent in Sodom)—a development a bit puzzling to account for. It seems also that he was not in the defending army, or, if he was, was unfortunate enough to be taken captive, along with his "goods" and his family (v. 16). Lot's initial choice of Sodom and Gomorrah was wrong. The Apostle (2 Pet. 2:8) tells us that "righteous Lot" was "sore distressed by the lascivious life of the

wicked" (Sodomites), that "seeing and hearing, he vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds." But there is not even an intimation in the Genesis account that Lot was under the necessity of living in that environment: why, then, did he not get out of it? It does not take any great exercise of the imagination to suggest the answers to this question. In the first place, it is almost a certainty that the family which Lot had reared in this environment of lust and violence was completely out of accord with his own "righteousness," and in the second place, we must admit that Lot's own "righteousness" was not sufficiently virile to impel him to break away from the wickedness which enveloped him on all sides (cf. ch. 19, also Matt. 10:34-39). *Those who pitch their tents toward Sodom usually come to the inglorious end of being swallowed up in Sodom. It was only through Abraham's intercession that Lot was finally rescued from the divine judgment visited upon all the Cities of the Plain.*

6. *The Rescue of Lot (vv. 13-16).*

Abram was still sojourning in the vale of Mamre when the tidings of Lot's capture was brought him by one who had escaped. Three Amorite brothers, Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, joined him with their clans, and he then armed his own three hundred and eighteen servants, and, dividing his small army into several bands, pursued the conquerors and fell upon them by night near Dan. Thus gaining the initiative, Abraham and his allies routed the invaders and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus, recovering the plunder and the prisoners. (See Num. 20:17). *Abram the Hebrew.* Lange (CDHCG, 404): "Abram the Hebrew, that is, the immigrant. Abraham, as Lot also, was viewed by the escaped, who was born in the land, as an immigrant, and because Lot the Hebrew was a captive, he sought Abram the Hebrew." ("Hebrew" as "crosser over," that is, the Euphrates: hence, "immigrant." This is the view of some authorities.) (Or, were the Hebrews to be

identified with the aggressive roaming Habiru, who are mentioned in tablets from the 19th and 18th centuries, and from the Tell el-Amarna letters of the 15th and 14th centuries, as invading "the king's cities"?) On the other hand, was not Abram sprung from a large branch of the Shemites who continued to live in Shinar, and who probably regarded Eber as their direct ancestor? It seems to be a confirmation of this view that the word 'Hebrew' appears with peculiar propriety applied to Abram here (v. 13) as a patronymic, in contradistinction to his allies, who are styled Amorites (14:13). "Hebrew" is the name used for self-identification to foreigners (40:13, 43:32). V. 14, *Lot as Abram's "brother"*: such terms as "brother," "sister," which were used by Hebrews as cognate terms are used by Orientals still, in a wide sense, equivalent to *relative*, kinsman or kinswoman (cf. 20:11 with 28:6, 24:60; 2 Sam. 19:13, Judg. 14:15, Job 42:11). *Note Abram's 318 trained men*. Note that these were men born in his house even before he had a son of his own (12:5, 14:14). *Note the pursuit to Dan*. Before its capture by the Danites, this city was known as Laish (Judg. 18:29). (HSB, 24): "The name was modernized in Genesis so that the reader could readily identify the familiar Danite city." Dan was the northernmost Israelite city; hence the phrase, "from Dan to Beersheba" (e.g., Judg. 20:1). But, writes Leupold (EG, 459): "This town, as all know, first received the name Dan in the days of the Judges: see Judg. 18:7, 29. The use of the term at this point would then be clearly post-Mosaic and evidence of authorship of the book later than the time of the Judges. Critics are so ready to accept this view that by almost universal consent they ignore the other possible location of Dan so entirely as though it was not even worthy of consideration. For another Dan in Gilead (see Deut. 34:1), mentioned apparently in 2 Sam. 24:6 as 'Dan Jaan,' excellently meets the needs of the case, for that matter even



better than does Laish. For Dan Jaan must lie, according to Deut. 34:1, on the northern edge of Gilead and therefore about east, perhaps fifteen or twenty miles from the southern end of the Dead Sea, and therefore along the route than an army retreating to Babylon and Elam would be most likely to take in approaching Damascus. Dan Laish lies too far north and presents difficulties for men in flight, who would hardly turn to Damascus in flight because of intervening rivers. Consequently, we have here no post-Mosaic terms and everything conforms excellently with the idea of Mosaic authorship." This seems to the present writer the most satisfactory explanation of this geographical problem. However, we must still recognize the fact that the "modernization" of a town-name by a later writer really has no significant bearing on the basic problem of Mosaic authorship. (Cf. my *Genesis*, Vol. I, pp. 62-66).

7. *The Meeting with Melchizedek (vv. 17-24)*

On his return from their rout of the kings from the East, Abram and his allies were greeted by the King of Sodom in the Vale of Shaveh ("the same is the King's Vale"). *Note the reference here to the king of Sodom.* Do we have here a conflict between v. 10 and this verse 17? Not necessarily. Did the king of Sodom of vv. 2, 8, 10 actually die in the bitumen pits, and was the king of Sodom of v. 17 his immediate successor? It is said by some that this could not have been the case because "a new king of Sodom could hardly be met with so soon" (see *supra*). The present writer holds this objection to be unwarranted for the simple reason that in hereditary monarchies when the death of a king occurs, succession to the throne follows at once as determined by customary or statutory law. (Even when a president of the United States dies while in office, his successor assumes the duties of the presidency without delay.) However, the correct resolution of this problem is in all probability that which

is suggested in a foregoing paragraph, namely, that the original text indicates that the defeated kings "fell," in the sense of having "flung themselves," into the bitumen pits to save their own skins, leaving their armies to find refuge in flight into the surrounding mountains. Hence Leupold, on v. 17 (EG, 461-462): "'The king of Sodom,' whom we last saw taking precipitate refuge in the bitumen pits, now again has come forth and desires to acknowledge publicly the inestimable benefit that Abram has bestowed upon him. Critics again attempt to invalidate the story by stating that this verse conflicts with verse 10, claiming that there the king of Sodom died, here he is resurrected. In all fairness they ought to offer their readers the simple explanation given above, that v. 10 may mean they hastily hid in the pits. The canons of criticism employed by critics are often so sharp that no writings, not even their own, could pass muster in the face of them." *The King's Vale*: according to Josephus (*Ant.*, 8:10) about a quarter of a mile north (or northeast) of Jerusalem; described as a broad, defenseless valley, also known as the "King's Dale." It was here that Absalom later erected a memorial pillar for himself (2 Sam. 18:18).

It was here that one of the most memorable, mysterious and prophetic incidents in Abraham's career, indeed in the entire Old Testament, occurred. It seems that the king of Sodom was accompanied by a mysterious and venerated personage by the name of Melchizedek, who is described as King of Salem and Priest of God Most High. The sudden appearance of one who united in himself both the kingly and priestly functions, of whose origin and history we know nothing, has led to much useless speculation. Maclear (COTH, 35): "Putting aside the more improbable conjectures, we may perhaps conclude that he was an eminent Canaanitish prince in the line of Ham, who had maintained the pure worship of the One True God, and who, according to a custom not uncommon in patriarchal

times, was at once king and priest. A sufficient proof of his high dignity is afforded by the fact that to him Abram reverently gave tithes of all that he had taken in his late successful expedition, and received his solemn blessing (Heb. 7:2, 6).” Nowhere does the bias of Jewish commentators against any New Testament contribution to the understanding of an Old Testament passage or incident show up more clearly than in their efforts to “explain away” the content of this fourteenth chapter of Genesis, and especially the account of Abram’s meeting with Melchizedek, by defining it as a *midrash* designed to glorify the patriarch Abraham (or even the antiquity of Jerusalem). For example, Morgenstern writes (JIBG): “It is a midrash pure and simple, in which the glory of the patriarch Abraham is enhanced by the representation of him as the paragon of bravery, intrepid and successful warriorship, honor, faithfulness, pride, and magnanimity.” By all critics of like “persuasion,” the entire account had to be post-exilic. From the point of view of the New Testament no satisfactory understanding of the Melchizedek incident is possible, apart from the teaching which is presented in the sixth and seventh chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here the Messianic significance of the story of the Priest-King Melchizedek is asserted too clearly for misunderstanding, and even though this explanation does really enhance the mystery, still and all it does bring it within the purview of a reasonable article of Christian faith. Beyond this we cannot go; without it the Melchizedek story is meaningless. It is not surprising, of course, that all who reject the Messiahship of Jesus are certain to reject, oftentimes to ridicule, the Old Testament evidence which supports the fact of His Messiahship. Among all such critics, Jew or Gentile, a blind spot develops as soon as New Testament teaching is disregarded either ignorantly or wilfully: a fact which again confirms one of the most important rules of interpretation—and one which has been

emphasized repeatedly in the present work—namely, that any passage of Scripture must be understood not only in the light of its immediate context but also in the light of Bible teaching as a whole. Those persons who refuse to correlate Old Testament and New Testament teaching properly will never acquire any comprehensive understanding of the Book of the Spirit.

*King of Salem.* The name *Melchizedek* means “king of righteousness.” *Salem* means “peace.” Salem here is undoubtedly Jerusalem, which did not become an Israelite city until the reign of David. “Salem” is simply a shortened form of “Jerusalem,” the *Urusalim* of the Amarna letters of the fourteenth century B.C.; the short form appears again in Psa. 76:2. This identification is further confirmed by the fact that proper names are frequently used in Scripture in abbreviated forms. Moreover, Abram is portrayed as having practically returned from his “military” expedition, that is, he is back to Hebron, and Jerusalem is not far from Hebron. Note that Melchizedek brought bread and wine to refresh the returning warriors. “He did this as one who wants to be seen to offer his support to such good men, who do such laudable things as Abram had done. He recognizes that a generous offer of rations for the troops was at this time the prime physical necessity. Nothing more should be sought in this act of Melchizedek’s. He expresses his friendship and perhaps his religious kinship with Abram by offering the most common form of meat and drink, ‘bread and wine’” (EG, 463). Lange (CDHCG, 404): “The papists explain it with reference to the sacrifices of the mass, but the reference is fatal to their own case, since Melchizedek gave the wine also. He brought forth, not he brought before God.”

*Priest of God Most High*, literally, *El Elyon*, of which the first term, *El*, from the same root as in *Elohim* (Gen. 1:1), signifies The Mighty One, and is seldom applied to

God without some qualifying attribute or cognomen, as *El Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1, God Almighty), *El Elobe Yisrael* (Gen. 33:20, God, the God of Israel); and the second, *Elyon*, occurring frequently (Num. 24:16, Psa. 7:17, 9:2) describes God as the Highest, the Exalted, etc., and is sometimes used in conjunction with Jehovah (Psa. 7:17), and with Elohim (Psa. 57:2), while sometimes it stands alone (Psa. 21:7). Whitelaw (PCG, 209): "Most probably the designation here describes the name under which the Supreme Deity was worshipped by Melchizedek and the king of Sodom, whom Abram recognizes as followers of the true God by identifying, as in v. 22, El-Elyon with Jehovah." Lange, quoting Delitzsch, declares that the signification of the name used here is *monotheistic*, "not God as the highest among many, but in a monotheistic sense, the one most high God" (CDHCG, 404). Leupold (EG, 465): "The priest defines who he considers El Elyon to be, namely, 'the Creator of heaven and earth'—a strictly monotheistic conception and entirely correct. Though we only assume that Melchizedek came into possession of the truth concerning God by way of the tradition that still prevailed pure and true in a few instances at this late date after the Flood, there is nothing that conflicts with such an assumption except an evolution theory of history, which, at this point, as so often, conflicts with facts. The verb for 'Creator' (for 'Creator' is a participle) is not the customary *bara*, as the usual Hebrew tradition knows it, but the less common *quanah*, a further indication that Melchizedek had a religious background different from Abram's. In fact it would seem that Melchizedek is not in possession of as full a measure of the truth as is Abram: for, apparently, Melchizedek does not know God as Yahweh, though the correctness of the conception 'God Most High' cannot be denied." We see no reason for questioning the view that a strain of Semitic monotheism persisted in many instances, perhaps isolated instances, despite the inroads of

idolatry and other forms of paganism, down through the time of Noah to the age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This fact seems to be pointed up here in the story of Abram's meeting with Melchizedek. The following comment (JB, 31, n.) is interesting and enlightening: "Ps. 76:2, the whole subsequent Jewish tradition, and many of the Fathers identify Salem with Jerusalem. Its priest-king Melchizedek (the name is Canaanite, cf. Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, Josh. 10:1) worships the Most High God, El-Elyon, a compound name, each of its two parts being the title of a god in the Phoenician pantheon. Elyon is used in the Bible (especially Psalms) as a divine title. In this passage, v. 22, El-Elyon is identified with the true God of Abraham. Melchizedek makes a brief and mysterious appearance in the narrative: he is king of that Jerusalem where Yahweh will deign to dwell, and a priest of the Most High even before the Levitical priesthood was established; moreover, he receives tithes from the Father of the chosen people. Ps. 110:4 represents him as a figure of the Messiah who is both king and priest: the application to Christ's priesthood is worked out in Heb. 7. Patristic tradition has developed and enriched this allegorical interpretation; in the bread and wine offered to Abraham it sees an image of the Eucharist and even a foreshadowing of the Eucharistic sacrifice—an interpretation that has been received into the Canon of the Mass. Several of the Fathers held the opinion that Melchizedek was a manifestation of the Son of God in person." (Protestantism, justifiably, has never seen any reason for accepting this Catholic "allegorical interpretation" of the bread-and-wine incident. See Lange's statement *supra*. Note that the word "Eucharist" is not in Scripture: it is a coinage of speculative theology, as is the assumption regarding Melchizedek's proffer of bread and wine to Abraham. Many theologians have not been able to resist the temptation to stretch Biblical allegory beyond all reasonable limits. This is especially true in cases in which the

imaginary extension of the meaning of a term seems to warrant sacerdotalism; that is, the magical powers of a special human priesthood. Traditional sacramentalism and sacerdotalism, both unscriptural, naturally go together: the one is presumed to justify the other.) Cf. HSB, 25: "Melchizedek (king of righteousness) was both priest and king of Salem (*peace*), probably the old name for Jerusalem. In the book of Hebrews the priestly function is stressed when Melchizedek is presented as a type of Christ. This emphasis rests on Ps. 110:4 where the Lord says through David, 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.' In Hebrews (7:1-17) the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek is shown to be superior to the Aaronic priesthood, which was transitory and imperfect." Speiser (ABG, 109): "The notice about Melchizedek merits a measure of confidence in its own right. He invokes an authentic Canaanite deity as a good Canaanite priest would be expected to do. Abraham, on the other hand, refers to Yahweh, using the Canaanite name or names in suitable apposition, which is not less appropriate in his particular case. That later religious Hebrew literature should have identified El-Elyon with Yahweh, quite possibly on the basis of this passage, is readily understandable. But this appears to be the only late reflex of Gen. 14. The narrative itself has all the ingredients of historicity." Again: (*ibid.*, 104): "Both elements ('*el* and '*elyon*) occur as names of specific deities, the first in Ugaritic and the second in Phoenician; the Aram. inscription from Sujin combines the two into a compound." It should be noted that *El* is the component rendered 'God' in compound names, such as 'God Almighty' (17:1), 'the Everlasting God' (21:33), 'God, the God of Israel' (33:20), 'God of Bethel' (35:7). It is held to be the oldest Semitic appellation for God. *Elyon* is used frequently in the Old Testament of the Lord (with *el* in Ps. 78:35), especially in psalms referring clearly to Jerusalem and its temple (Psa.

9:2, 21:7, 46:4, 50:14, 87:5). (See IBG, 598). (SIB, 234): "Who this Melchizedek was, this priest of God among the Canaanites, greater than Abram, the friend of God, who were his parents or his successors, is on purpose concealed by the Holy Ghost. And hence he is without father or mother, predecessor or successor, in historical account, in order that he might typify the incomprehensible dignity, the amazing pedigree, and unchangeable duration of Jesus Christ, our great High priest. Heb. 6:20, 'Jesus was made a high priest after the order of Melchizedek'; Heb. 5:6, 10; Psa. 110:4; Heb. 7:1-24)."

In the New Testament account of Melchizedek (Heb., chs. 6, 7), we find him described as both king and priest; hence our Christ (Messiah) is likewise a King-Priest after the order of Melchizedek. It is also said of Melchizedek that he is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," "but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually" (Heb. 7:2, 3). It is further declared that our great High Priest was made High Priest "not after the law of a carnal commandment" (as in the case of the Levitical priesthood), but in "the likeness of Melchizedek" was made High Priest "after the power of an endless life" (7:15-17). Does this really mean that the analogy is only "in the historical account"? So writes Milligan (NTCH, 198): ". . . the Apostle manifestly uses these negative epithets in our text, to denote simply that the parentage of Melchizedek is unknown; that so far as the record goes, he was without father and without mother, and furthermore that he was without descent, or, rather, without genealogy. Nothing concerning either his ancestry or his posterity is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. There, he appears on the page of typical history isolated and alone. . . . Christ, in the sense in which he is here contemplated by our author, had no predecessors, and he will have no successors. He himself will continue to officiate as our royal high priest during



the entire period of his mediatorial reign. And so it was with Melchisedec. So far as the record goes, his priesthood, as well as that of Christ, was unbroken, uninterrupted by any changes of succession. All that is here meant by his being made like unto the Son of God and abiding a priest perpetually is simply this: that like Jesus he completely fills up the entire era of his royal priesthood in his own proper person. This period, however short, is intended to serve as a typical representation of the era of Christ's priesthood, and Melchisedec is thus made a more perfect type of Christ than was Aaron or any of his successors. . . . And all that is therefore implied in the words of the text is simply this: that as the shadow, however small it may be, corresponds with the substance which forms it, so also did the priesthood of Melchisedec correspond with that of Christ. Each of them was unbroken, uninterrupted, and relatively perfect in itself. Great care is therefore necessary in dealing with these relative terms and expressions, lest peradventure we give them an extension which is wholly beyond what was intended by the Holy Spirit."

True it is that "this Canaanite crosses for a moment the path of Abram, and is unhesitatingly recognized as a person of higher spiritual rank than the friend of God. Disappearing as suddenly as he came in, he is lost to the sacred writing for a thousand years; and then a few emphatic words for another moment bring him into sight as a type of the coming Lord of David. Once more, after another thousand years, the Hebrew Christians are taught to see in him a proof that it was the consistent purpose of God to abolish the Levitical priesthood. His person, his office, his relation to Christ, and the seat of his sovereignty, have given rise to innumerable discussions, which even now can scarcely be considered as settled" (OTH, 99). But can we really be satisfied with the view that all that is said of Melchizedek as a type of Christ is fulfilled simply "in historical account," that is, without reference to the

real life-identity of this King-priest? Is not some truth infinitely more profound intended here (1) in the Old Testament picture of the intercourse between Abram and Melchizedek, and especially (2) in the New Testament elaboration of the significance of Melchizedek as typical of the Priesthood of Christ. Is this historical—or to be more exact, *epistolary*—presentation of the identity of Melchizedek all that is implied in Abram's recognition of this king-priest of what was later to be the locale of the throne of David? (cf. Psa. 110:4, Isa. 9:6, 7). Note especially Heb. 7:4, "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth out of the chief spoils." (HEW, 114-115): "The proof of the greatness of Melchisedec here given is threefold. 1. In the nomination of the person that was subject unto him—Abraham; he was the stock and root of the whole people, their common father, in whom they were first separated from the other nations to be a people of themselves. It was he who first received the promise and the covenant with the token of it; therefore, the Hebrews esteemed Abraham next unto God Himself. 2. In the fact that Abraham was a patriarch, that is, a father who is a prince and ruler in this family. Those who succeeded Abraham are called 'patriarchs'; but he, being the first of all these, is accounted the principal, and hath the pre-eminence over all the rest. If anyone were greater than Abraham in his own time, it must be acknowledged that it was upon the account of some privilege that was above all that ever that whole nation as descendants of Abraham were made partakers of. But that this was so the Apostle proves by the instance ensuing, namely, that Abraham gave to Melchisedec. 3. Abraham 'gave the tenth of the spoils,' not arbitrarily but in the way of a necessary duty; not as an honorary respect, but as a religious office. He gave 'the tenth,' delivering it up to the use and disposal of the priest of the Most High God. He gave the tenth of the spoils,

a portion taken out of the whole, and representing the whole. What further concerns the greatness of Melchizedek the Apostle declares in the ensuing verses, . . . The sole reason that can be given for the greatness of Melchizedek is, that God raised him up, and disposed of him into that condition of His own good pleasure." (Comments by John Owen on Heb. 7:1-7).

It should be noted that in response to Abram's unsolicited manifestation of the most devout regard for Melchizedek (actually, no doubt, for the twofold office vested in him), that the latter is said to have pronounced a twofold blessing himself, namely, he blessed Abram (of God Most High), and he blessed God Most High (El Elyon) also. Leupold (EG, 465-466): "Melchizedek's blessing is in every way what it should be: it ascribes the glory to God and lets Abram appear merely as what he is, an instrument God deigned to use—so the second half of the blessing. The first half had represented Abram as standing in need of the blessing of El Elyon and therefore bestowed that blessing from the hands of the Omnipotent Creator. . . . There can be no doubt about it that whether long or short this blessing was a clear-cut confession of him who gave it and a strong testimony to the truth, given at a solemn moment under memorable circumstances also in the ears of an ungodly and unbelieving group of neighbors. No doubt, on Moses' part the object of recording so memorable a piece of history connected with one of the major cities of the blessed land, was to impress the people with the glorious record that truth had had in the earliest day in some of these venerable cities."

Thus it will be seen that both of these factors, namely, Abram's manifestation of profound regard for Melchizedek, and the latter's twofold benediction in response, accompanied by his provision of food for the rescuing forces, surely point up the fact that the *timelessness* attributed to Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews

must be regarded as something more than a matter of epistolary recording. Certainly this entire account is evidence that a strong monotheism continued at least among some Semitic groups down to Abraham's time (cf. Gen. 4:26), and that Abram inwardly recognized this fact in the personal regard he manifested toward this king-priest of Salem and outwardly recognized it in the tithe (the "tenth" of the spoils which he had taken) which he presented to him. The tithe was later incorporated in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 27:30-33, Num. 18:21-32). But do these various factors indicate anything more than this? In the present writer's opinion it can reasonably be assumed that they do; that they might well support the conviction held by several of the Church Fathers, and by many able Biblical scholars throughout the ages, that Melchizedek was an epiphany of the personal Logos (John 1:1), the One "whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" Mic. 5:2, (RSV, "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days"), the One who is the First and the Last, the Living One, Rev. 1:17-18 (that is, without beginning or end), the One who became God's Only Begotten in the Bethlehem manger (John 1:1-3, Luke 1:35, John 3:16, Gal. 4:4). Is not this One—the Logos, the Son—the executive Agent in the unfolding of God's Eternal Purpose, both in Creation and in Redemption? (Cf. Psa. 33:6, 9; Psa. 148:1-6; Heb. 11:3, Col. 1:16, John 1:3, 1 Tim. 2:6, Eph. 1:7, Rom. 3:24-25, Heb. 9:12.) Of course we know that the Bible is made up of two main parts, known as Covenants or (in stereotyped form) as Testaments or Wills. The second part is known as the New or Last Will and Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If He—Jesus Christ—left a New or Last Will, did He not authorize an Old or First Will and Testament, at some time and for some purpose? If so, what is this First or Old Will? Where is it to be found? Is it not the Old Covenant or Testament of the Scriptures? Was it not also *the Testa-*

*ment of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?* That is to say, when God finished the work of Creation and entered into His rest (Gen. 2:2), did not the Logos, the Son, take over the direction of the divine Plan of Redemption? *Is not the Old Testament as truly His as the New Testament is?* If not, what does the Apostle mean, 1 Cor. 10:4, when he tells us that ancient Israel in the Exodus "drank of a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ"? (Cf. Exo. 17:6, Num. 20:11, Psa. 78:15.) Furthermore, who was the "Angel of Jehovah" of the Old Testament record? Strong writes (ST, 319): In the Old Testament "the appearances of 'the angel of Jehovah' seem to be preliminary manifestations of the divine Logos." (Cf. Gen. 18:2, 13; Dan. 3:25, 28; Gen. 22:11, 16; Gen. 31:11-13, 16:9-13, 48:15, 16; Exo. 3:2, 4, 5; Judg. 13:20-22.) Strong (*ibid*): "Though the phrase 'angel of Jehovah' is sometimes used in later Scriptures to denote a merely human messenger or created angel, it seems in the Old Testament, with hardly more than a single exception, to designate the pre-incarnate Logos, whose manifestations in angelic or human form foreshadowed his final coming in the flesh." (Cf. also Josh. 5:13-15 and Gen. 32:1-2.) Who was this Prince of the Host of Yahweh? Was He the angel Michael (Dan. 10:13, 12:1; Jude 9, Rev. 12:7), or was He the Pre-incarnate Logos? See also John 17:4, 24; John 8:58, 19:30; Phil. 2:5-8: it should be noted that the statements of Jesus referred to here were all spoken under the Old Covenant, before the New Covenant was ratified at Golgoltha and the Christian Dispensation was ushered in, on Pentecost, A.D. 30 (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb., chs. 8, 9; John 1:17; 2 Cor., ch. 3; Matt. 5:17-20, Acts 2. etc.). We might add here that those who reject the Virgin Birth of Jesus should be prepared to "explain away" the repeated Scripture affirmations of His eternal Pre-existence (cf. John 17:5, 8:58, 1:1-5; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:13-18; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:1-4) as the Logos, the Very

Image, and the Effulgence of God. All this is in harmony with the view held by many competent scholars that whereas the name *Elohim* designates the Creator-God, "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. 57:15), the name *Yahweh* designates the Covenant-God, whose love embraces especially His moral creation (John 3:16, 1 John 4:7-11) to the extent of having provided redemption of spirit and soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23) for all who commit themselves to Him by the obedience of faith (Rom. 3:21-25). Do we not have abundant evidence, then, to justify our conviction that the Covenant-God of Scripture is indeed the Logos, the Author of both the Old Testament and the New? To sum up: *It is the conviction of the present writer that this identification of Melchizedek as a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Logos is in harmony with Biblical teaching as a whole, and that it does justice to the details of the Genesis narrative of Abram's meeting with this King of Salem and Priest of God Most High, more fully than any other explanation that can be offered.*

Other noteworthy details of this meeting of Abram with the King of Sodom and the King-Priest Melchizedek are the following: (1) The apparent *magnanimity* of the King of Sodom, who, perhaps anticipating that like donations of the spoils might be made to him as to Melchizedek, said simply, Give me the souls (of my people), *i.e.*, the domestic slaves (cf. 12:5), and keep the goods recaptured ("the movable chattels"), such as precious garments, all gold and silver, weapons, cattle, etc., to thyself. This, of course, Abram was entitled to do, according to the customary laws of the time, by right of military victory. It must be recognized, of course, that the spoils in this case included much that had been stolen by the Eastern kings from their original owners (in the cities of the plain), and probably additional spoils which the marauders had seized elsewhere in the course of their looting expedition. These facts seem

to enhance the generosity of the King of Sodom in this case. (2) *Abram's oath and consequent reply*, vv. 22-24. I have lifted up my hand unto Yahweh, God Most High (El-Elyon), "possessor of heaven and earth," that I will not take anything, not even a thread or a shoe-latchet "that is thine"? Why not? "Lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." Abram was not entirely averse to accepting presents from heathen kings (cf. 12:16), but in this case the patriarch could not consent to sharing in the slightest measure the wealth of the impious Sodomites. What a striking contrast to Lot's selfish acts! No one could deny that Abram had the privilege of keeping these chattels as his due. "Abraham, however, cannot do such a thing. He is not covetous; the thought of the acquisition of wealth never entered into the undertaking of the expedition. But another weightier consideration enters into the case: Abram desires to stand out clearly as a man who prospers only because of God's blessings. Hitherto this status of his had been unmistakably clear; Abram had never sought wealth, nor resorted to questionable methods of getting it; nor had anyone contributed to his wealth. Least of all could Abram accept a generous bestowal from a man of the calibre of the King of Sodom, a purely sensual materialist and idolater. The acceptance of the gift would have impugned Abram's spiritual standing. Consequently, Abram summarily rejects the proposal" (EG, 467). Critics have attempted to make contradictions here where everything harmonizes, by contending that Abram who disclaimed a right to the spoils for his own use could not therefore have bestowed a tenth on Melchizedek. "The least bit of effort to understand would show that a religious tenth reveals the same spirit as the refusal for personal use." As a matter of fact, the tenth belonged to Yahweh at all times: to have kept it would have been robbing the One who is the "possessor of heaven and earth." "One

natural exception must be made: something of that which was taken from the vanquished enemy had to be used to feed the deliverers. Abram wanted it understood that he felt justified in having appropriated this much. His confederates, Aner, Eschol and Mamre, were, of course, not to be bound by his own conscientious scruples. These men were at liberty to make whatever adjustment they desired with the King of Sodom" (EG, 469). There is little doubt that Abram knew what kind of a character he was dealing with in the person of the King of Sodom; he knew full well that this king would later distort the facts of the case in such a way as to make the claim that he had made Abram wealthy, and the patriarch was not going to have any of this. (3) *The oath itself*: "I have lifted up my hand to Yahweh." A common form of oath-taking (Deut. 32:40, Ezek. 20:5-6; Dan. 12:7; Rev. 10:5, 6; cf. Virgil's *Aeneid*, 12, 195). Oaths have been employed from earliest times; the purpose of an oath is explained in Heb. 6:16, "For men swear by the greater; and in every dispute of theirs the oath is final for confirmation." Under ancient customary law, the oath was rigidly held to be sacred, and perjury was one of the most heinous crimes a man could perpetrate. (HSB, 25): "In the Old Testament they were employed for (1) confirming covenants (26:28; 31:44, 53); (2) resolving controversies in courts of law (Exo. 22:11, Num. 5:19); (3) guaranteeing the fulfillment of promised acts or sacred duties (24:3, 4; 50:25; Num. 30:2, 2 Chron. 15:14). Believers have always been forbidden to take oaths in the name of idols or created things (Josh. 23:7, Matt. 5:34-36, Jas. 5:12). God Himself used an oath to show His immutability (22:16; Num. 14:28; Heb. 6:17). But the Lord Jesus admonished believers to fulfill their promises without the need of resorting to any oaths, so their word would be as good as their bond (Matt. 5:34-37)."



To sum up with Lange (CDHCG, 405): "As Abram declares *his intimate communion* with Melchizedek, and introduces it into the very forms of expression of his religion, so he utterly refuses *any community of goods* with the King of Sodom. He reserves only what his servants had already consumed in the necessities of war, and that part of the spoil which fell to his three confederates, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre (Num. 31:26, 1 Sam. 30:26)." In view of the foregoing array of facts, how utterly stupid becomes the critical claim that v. 20, in which we are told that Abram gave to Melchizedek a tithe of the recaptured booty, contradicts v. 23, in which it is said that Abram returned to the King of Sodom all the recaptured booty, refusing to retain even a shoe-latchet for himself.

#### 8. *Reliability of the Narrative*

It is repeatedly charged by the critics that the content of chapter 14 is "an intrusive section within the patriarchal framework," and because (as they say) it cannot be identified with J, E or P, it must be ascribed to an isolated source. To this critique we are bound to reply that—to any unbiased person—the content of this chapter is definitely related to Old Testament history (1) in the fact that it traces the ultimate destiny of Lot and his progeny (the Moabites and Ammonites), as we shall see later (Gen. 19:30-38; Deut. 2:9, 19; Psa. 83:8); (2) in the fact that it justifies the canonization of the book of Ruth, in which the Messianic genealogy is carried forward through Ruth, a Moabite maiden, to Obed, to Jesse, and then to David (Ruth 1:4, 4:17; 1 Chron. 2:9-16, Matt. 1:5, Luke 3:32). It is commonplace of Old Testament prophecy that Messiah should be of the royal lineage of David (Matt. 1:1; Isa. 9:7, 16:5; Psa. 110:1; Matt. 22:41-45, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44, John 7:42, Acts 2:34-35, Rom. 1:3, 2 Tim. 2:8, Heb. 1:13; Rev. 5:5, 22:16). Moreover, the content of Genesis 14 is inseparably linked with explanatory pas-

sages in the New Testament: without it, these passages would be maningless. (See Luke 17:28-32, 2 Pet. 2:6-8; Rom. 4:23-24, 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). *The fact must always be kept in mind that the Bible is a whole and a unitary whole.*

Hence, writes Speiser (ABG, 106-109): "A fresh re-examination of all the available scraps of evidence, both internal and external, favors an early date, scarcely later in fact than the middle of the second millenium. For one thing, the account is admittedly not the work of J, or E, let alone P. Who, then, could have had an interest in learned speculations of this sort? For another thing, Sodom, Gomorrah, and three neighboring towns are still very much in the picture . . . Most important of all, the names of the foreign invaders and their respective countries are not made up. They have an authentic ring, in spite of all the hazards of transliteration and transmission; one of them at least (Arioch) takes us back to the Old Babylonian age, with which the period of Abraham has to be synchronized. . . . The geographic detail that marks the route of the invaders, and the casual listings of the Cities of the Plain, lend further support to the essential credibility of the narrative. Who the foreign invaders were remains uncertain. It is highly improbable, however, that they were major political figures. The mere fact that Abraham could rout them with no more than 318 warriors at his disposal (the force is just small enough to be realistic) would seem to suggest that the outlanders were foreign adventurers bent on controlling the copper mines south of the Dead Sea. The most likely date for such an expedition would be approximately the eighteenth century B.C. Finally, the notice about Melchizedek merits a measure of confidence in its own right. He invokes an authentic Canaanite deity as a good Canaanite priest would be expected to do. Abraham, on the other hand, refers to

Yahweh, using the Canaanite name or names in suitable apposition, which is no less appropriate in his particular case. That later religious Hebrew literature should have identified El-Elyon with Yahweh, quite probably on the basis of this passage, is readily understandable. But this appears to be the only late reflex of Gen. 14. The narrative itself has all the ingredients of history." (We cannot help wondering why so many commentators seem to be blind to the fact that Abram's confederates furnished troops, in addition to Abram's own 318 men.)

Cornfeld testifies in like vein (AtD, 59): "Abraham and his band of 'hanikhim' (followers) corresponds almost exactly to the chieftains of the early part of the second millenium, with their 'hanaku' or 'hnku.' We know from cuneiform texts in Mari, Ugarit, Alalah (a state north of Ugarit), and Boghazkoi (the Hittite kingdom), that city-states and tribes were linked by treaties or 'covenants.' Although the opponents of Abraham cannot be identified with certainty, the personal names Tudhalia (Tidal in Hebrew), Ariukka (Arioch), and place names which have been identified, fit well into the contemporary picture of the 18th-17th centuries, One of the Dead Sea Scrolls, now at the Hebrew University, has a passage elaborating on the events, and containing many new geographical names east of the Jordan, around the Dead Sea and Canaan proper. This material gives Genesis 14 a new timelessness for the modern reader. Few stories in Genesis have had so much written about them. The antiquity of this story and the accuracy of the names referred to in it are being constantly corroborated as new background material becomes available."

As a matter of fact, the general authenticity of the Patriarchal narratives is in our day seldom called in question by those who are familiar with the findings of the archaeologists. The historicity of the personages and events

related in Genesis seems now to be firmly established. Dr. Albright (FSAC, 81): "As critical study of the Bible is more and more influenced by the rich new material from the ancient Near East, we shall see a steady rise in respect for the historical significance of now neglected or despised passages and details in the Old and New Testaments." The distinguished Orientalist, Dr. Nelson Glueck of Hebrew Union College, writes (RD, 31): "The archaeological explorer in Bible lands must be aware of the fact that as important as the Bible is for historical information, it is definitely not primarily a chronicle of history, as we understand that term today. It is above all concerned with true religion and only secondarily with illustrative records. Even if the latter had suffered through faulty transmission or embellishments, the purity and primacy of the Bible's innermost message would not thereby be diminished. As a matter of fact, it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries. They form tesserae in the vast mosaic of the Bible's almost incredibly correct historical memory."

This final testimony is from the pen of James Muilenburg, distinguished contributor to the *Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. I, p. 296, "The History of the Religion of Israel"): "Archaeology has revealed an extraordinary correspondence between the general social and cultural conditions portrayed in Genesis and those exposed by excavations. Discoveries from such sites as Nuzi, Mari, and elsewhere, provide the geographical, cultural, linguistic, and religious background against which the stories of the patriarchs are laid."

TENTING TOWARD SODOM  
FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING  
Pitching One's Tent Toward Sodom

Gen. 13:12

Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. His choice was determined solely by contemplated *personal advantage*, by the prospect of a "more abundant" *earthly* life: his highest values were those of this present evil world. Greed, with the prospect of ease and luxury, proved to be too alluring for him to resist it. Having pitched his tent toward Sodom, he finally went all the way and became a resident of that den of iniquity. No matter to what extent his "righteous soul" was "sore distressed" (2 Pet. 2:7-8) by the lust and violence which all but engulfed him, he lacked the moral stamina to get himself and his family out of it. Flabbiness of character showed itself in everything he did. The root of his tragedy was that his values were all distorted: he did not know how to put first things first. His life story reminds us of a similar tragedy portrayed in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. This tragic tale leaves one emotionally depressed by its sordidness; nevertheless, it does inculcate a tremendous moral lesson. The protagonist, Willy Loman—a salesman whose escapist tendencies blinded him to his real mediocrity—worshipped only one god, the great god Success. In pursuing this false god, he sacrificed his home and family, and he himself could find "no exit" except by suicide. Such is always the tragic end of one who pitches his tent toward Sodom, that is, unless he "comes to himself" and resolutely comes back to the Father's house.

What happened to Lot happens to every man who pitches his tent toward Sodom unless and until he heeds the cry, "Come out of her, my people" (Rev. 18:4). In what ways, then, do men and women in our time pitch their tents toward Sodom: They do it in various ways, as follows: 1. By getting into the wrong crowd (Psa. 1:1;

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Prov. 1:10, 4:14, 9:6; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:16). 2. By assuming the posture of piety (piosity, religiosity), while conforming more and more to the ways of the world ("the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life," 1 John 2:15-17; cf. Rom. 12:2). 3. By neglecting the appointments of the Spiritual Life (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rom. 6, 11:23-30; Heb. 10:25). Where there is life, there is growth; where there is no growth, the living thing stagnates and dies (Rom. 14:17, 2 Pet. 1:5-11, 3:18). 4. By turning from the Word of God, the Foundation that stands sure and strong (2 Tim. 2:19) to the vain babblings of human speculation, "philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men" (Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20, 2 Tim. 2:16).

What of parents who move from one community to another without ever giving any thought as to what effects the new environment will have on the moral character of their children? How many put the demands of their business or profession above the spiritual welfare of their families? Are not these instances of pitching one's tent toward Sodom?

But the greatest tragedy of all is the fact that *every human being*, on reaching the age of discretion, pitches his tent toward Sodom. Rom. 3:23—"all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God."

Lot himself would have perished in Sodom had not God come to his rescue. Likewise, all sinners will eventually perish in hell, unless they heed God's call to repentance. (Luke 13:3, Matt. 25:46, Rev. 6:16-17).

### The Priesthood of Christ

Heb. 6:20—"Jesus . . . having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

The terms "Messiah" (Hebrew), "Christos" (Greek), and "Christ" (English), all mean "The Anointed One". Jesus the Christ (or Jesus Christ) is, then, The Anointed

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of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:14-15). It was the custom by Divine warrant in Old Testament times to formally anoint into office those who were called to be prophets, priests, and kings. See Exo. 28:41; Lev. 16:32; 1 Sam. 9:16, 15:1, 16:12-13; 1 Ki. 19:15-16, etc. This anointing was emblematic of investiture with sacred office, and of particular sanctification or designation to the service of God. To anoint meant, says Cruden, "to consecrate and set one apart to an office" (s.v., *Concordance*). The element used in the ceremony of anointing was olive oil (Exo. 30:22-25). This "holy anointing oil" was typical of the comforting and strengthening gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit.

To accept Jesus as Christ, therefore, is to accept Him as prophet to whom we go for the Word of Life, to accept Him as our great high priest who intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father, and to accept Him as King from whose will there is no appeal (because, of course, He wills only our good). (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; John 8:31-32, 16:14-15; Matt. 28:17; Eph. 1:19-23, 4:5; Col. 1:13-18, etc.).

According to the teaching of the Bible, there are three Dispensations of true religion. (Religion is that system of faith and practice by which man is bound anew to God, from the root, *lig*, and the prefix, *re*, meaning to "bind back" or "bind anew".) Dispensations changed—from the family to the national to the universal—as the type of priesthood changed. The Patriarchal Dispensation was the age of family rule and family worship, with the patriarch (paternal head) acting as prophet (revealer of God's will), priest (intercessor) and king, for his entire living progeny. The Jewish Dispensation was ushered in with the establishment of a national institution of worship (the Tabernacle, and later the Temple) and a national priesthood (the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood). The Christian Dispensation had its beginnings with the abrogation of the Old Covenant and ratification of the New, by

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one and the same event—the death of Christ on the Cross (although the Jewish institution was permitted to remain as a social and civil institution some forty years longer, that is, down to the Destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of its people by the Roman armies, A.D. 70). (Cf. John 1:17, Gal. 3:23-29, 2 Cor. 3:1-11, Col. 2:13-15, and especially the Epistle to the Hebrews, chs. 7, 8, 9, 10). Under the Christian System all Christians are priests unto God, and Christ is their High Priest (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:10, Rom. 12:1-2, 8:34; Heb. 2:17, also chs. 3, 5, 7; 1 Tim. 2:5, 1 John 2:1, etc.). It will be recalled that Alexander Campbell referred to the Patriarchal Dispensation as the starlight age, to the Jewish Dispensation as the moonlight age, to the special ministry of John the Immerser (to the Jewish nation) as the twilight age, and to the present or Christian Dispensation (which may rightly be designated also the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit) as the sunlight age, of the unfolding of the divine Plan of Redemption. These successive “ages,” therefore, embrace the successive stages of the revelation of true religion, as set forth in the Scriptures. Refusal to recognize this fundamental unity of the Bible *as a whole* can result only in confusion, presumption, and, ultimately, eternal separation from God and all good (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

The subject matter of the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34, Heb., ch. 8). This is proved by the superiority of Christ, the Son of God, to angels, to Moses, to the Levitical priesthood, etc. Judaizers, in and out of the church, were contending, it seems, that if Jesus was truly Messiah, as High Priest He must have sprung from the tribe of Levi, because that tribe alone had been set apart as Israel's priesthood. But, said they, Jesus actually hailed from the tribe of Judah, and this fact disqualified Him for the priestly office. The writer of the Epistle, replying to this argu-



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ment, frankly admitted that the Lord Jesus did hail from the tribe of Judah, the tribe from which no high priest was ever supposed to come, according to the Old Testament writings. But, said he, referring to Psa. 110:4, God Himself declared in days of old (affirmed by an immutable oath) that the Messiah's High Priesthood should be after the order of Melchizedek, not after the order of the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood; that, whereas the Levitical priesthood was authenticated only by the power of a carnal commandment, the priesthood of the Messiah, like that of Melchizedek, was authenticated by the power of an endless life; hence, that whereas the former was temporal and imperfect, the latter was eternal and in every respect perfect or complete. Moreover, the Messianic High Priest, like Melchizedek of old who was King of Salem and Priest of God Most High, was destined to combine in His own Person both the Eternal Kingship and the Eternal Priesthood. (See Hebrews, chs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.) This is true simply because of the fact that our Lord Jesus, God's Only Begotten, is the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Living One (Rev. 1:4, 8; 1:17-18; cf. John 1:1-14; Eph. 1:3-14, 2:11-22, 3:1-12; Col. 2:12-20; 1 Cor. 15:20-28, Phil. 2:5-11, etc.).

The priestly office is necessitated (1) by the difference in rank between the divine and the human, (2) by the very structure of human nature and its needs. Man has always felt the need of confession and intercession. This is a recognized psychological fact: catharsis, the draining off of one's burdens by sharing them with a trusted friend is the first step in the psychoanalytic cure; every minister of the Gospel and every physician knows this to be true. If a famished man is not supplied with food, he will seize anything within his reach; and if the wants of the soul are not lawfully satisfied, the soul will seek unlawful and unholy gratification. *If Christ does not fill the heart, some monstrous idol or some human*

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*priest (or even some supreme object of devotion such as Party or Cause, to the monolithic Leninist) will fill it.* People need a confessor and intercessor. And if they do not learn to make God their Confessor, prayer their confessional, and Christ Jesus their Intercessor, they will heap to themselves a human confessional and a human priesthood, and so degrade true religion into superstition.

A true priest must possess three qualities or excellences:

1. *He must have authority.* Authority is *moral power*, and moral power is *right*, that is, the right to possess something, to do something, or to require something to be done. Who, then, truly has this power? Not the Jewish priests of old, because they were compassed about with infirmities. They had no authority to forgive sin in any sense of the term: all the High Priest of Israel could do was to go into the Holy of Holies on each Day of Atonement and offer sacrifices for the people; but even this did not procure the forgiveness of their sins. God merely laid them over, put them out of His Mind, so to speak, until the next Day of Atonement; and so the weight of human sin, laid over from year to year, grew into what was veritably a crushing burden until the one Sin-offering was made once for all, on the Cross of Calvary (Hebrews, ch. 9). John 1:29—note the singular here, “the Lamb of God that taketh away the *sin* of the world.”

Who has this moral power? Not the priests of either pagan or papal Rome. They are men, and their assumption of it is a monstrous imposition upon the credulity of the masses. Jesus expressly forbids our calling anyone “Father” in a spiritual sense, except our Father in Heaven (Matt. 23:9): He alone is entitled to be addressed as “Holy Father” (John 17:11, 25).

Who, then, does have this authority (moral power) to forgive sin, to be intercessor for the saints? Only one Person has it—Jesus of Nazareth: “He hath this priesthood unchangeable”; He alone “is able to save to the

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uttermost them that draw near unto God through him" (Heb. 7:24-25); He alone "ever liveth to make intercession for" His saints. This authority is His by virtue of WHO HE IS, The Living One: He who is alive for evermore; He is without beginning or end (Rev. 1:1, 4, 8, 17-18; John 8:58), and therefore His power is that of an endless life (Heb. 7:16). While in the flesh He exercised this moral power as He saw fit (cf. Luke 5:17-26, 23:39-43); now that He is Acting Sovereign of the universe and Absolute Monarch of the Kingdom of God, He alone has the right to intercede for His people at the Right Hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19, 14:62; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22). All authority (moral power) has been given unto Him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18); and He must reign until He has put all His enemies, including death itself, under His feet for ever (1 Cor. 15:20-23, Phil. 2:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:4).

2. *The true priest must be characterized by purity.* This fact manifests itself in our desire for the prayers of a good man in times of trouble; even a dying man would summon all his energies to spurn the prayer of a hypocrite offered in his behalf; such a prayer is an abomination to God and to man (Jas. 5:16; Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46-49; John 15:16; Col. 3:17). "A preacher is not a priest, except as every Christian man is a priest; but he is called upon to discharge certain priestly functions, to comfort the sorrowful, support the weak, pray with the dying; and the demand for his personal purity is as righteous as it is instinctive and universal." The Jewish high priest wore on his forehead a plate of pure gold, on which was engraved, "Holiness to the Lord," God thus affirming the holiness of his ministry.

Now our High Priest alone meets this demand for personal purity. Heb. 7:26—"Such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and

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made higher than the heavens." Note the saying, Such a High Priest is *becoming* to us, that is, appropriate, befitting. Not that it is fortuitous that we have such a High Priest, but that it is *necessary*: no other could fill the office of the eternal Priesthood. Consider, then, the High Priest of our Christian profession. "Living on earth, yet undefiled with sin; keeping company with the outcast, but only to bless and save them. Our purity is soon lost; we leave it in our cradles. We lay off our innocence with our child garments. But the Son of Man lived a holy and undefiled life. How beautiful! How wonderful! that human life of pain, hunger, sorrow, thorns, temptation, and death, without sin!" (Heb. 2:18, 4:14-15, 10:19-25).

3. *The true priest must be characterized by sympathy.* Perhaps *compassion* would be the better word: pity for the undeserving and the guilty (cf. Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60). "We need a priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He must be pure, to appear before God. He must be filled with all human sympathies, to win our love and bear our burdens." It is the human heart of Jesus that qualifies Him for the eternal priesthood. "It behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren," that is, to take upon Himself their human nature, "that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:14-18). "These words declare, not simply that he was made in all things like unto his brethren, but that it was *necessary* that he should be made in all things like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest." It was absolutely *necessary* for Him to assume our human nature and experience its frailties, in order to qualify for this eternal Priesthood. Heb. 13:8—"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Men sympathize with those of their own class or kind, but the rich can hardly

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sympathize with the poor, the learned with the ignorant, adults with children and youth. "Let every tempted and struggling child be taught to go boldly to Christ, and find mercy and grace in the time of need. We need not be afraid to trust the faith of the child because he cannot appreciate the evidences of the divine origin of the Gospel. Salvation is in the Gospel, not in its evidences. Life is in the air we breathe, and not in any knowledge of its causes and chemistry." Our High Priest sympathized with all who needed mercy and salvation: with frail and impulsive Simon Peter; with the sisters of Bethany, Martha and Mary, at the grave of Lazarus; with the woman taken in the act of adultery (no doubt a victim of the social evils of her day); with the publican Zaccheus; with all who needed the true Burden Bearer of all time. Our High Priest, while in the flesh, was often tired and hungry; suffered loneliness such as only His sensitive soul could suffer; felt despair, as when He cried out on the Cross, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was tempted in all points as we are, *and yet without sin*. His sympathy is for all humankind, not for their sins, but for their frailties and struggles. (Cf. Psa. 103:13-18).

He knows all our sorrows. He knows all our struggles. He knows all our frustrations. He knows all our problems. He is our great High Priest who knoweth all our infirmities. The trouble with us is that *we will not come unto Him that* we may have all these blessings. What hope can we have of heaven without such a High Priest? What hope does the man have who ignores Him, who rejects the only salvation ever offered, the only Atonement provided, the only Intercession available? If we who are in Christ so often feel our unworthiness so much that we question whether we shall ever be able to attain, what must be the sad condition of the one who does not even make the effort, the one who proudly asserts his own good-

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ness instead of reclining on the grace and advocacy of Christ? "If the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18).

(The quotes appearing above are from a sermon by John Shackelford, in *Biographies and Sermons of Pioneer Preachers*, edited by Goodpasture and Moore, Nashville, Tenn. 1954.)

### REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART TWENTY-SEVEN

1. Where did Abram stop at first on his return to Canaan?
2. What is indicated by the statement that "Abram called on the name of Yahweh"?
3. What caused the separation of Abram and Lot? What choice did Lot make?
4. What tragedy is in the statement that Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom"?
5. What did Lot probably see when he "lifted up his eyes"?
6. Describe the Plain of the Jordan.
7. What was the blessing which Abram received from Yahweh at this time?
8. To what place did Abram now move, the place where he pitched his third tent?
9. What more do we learn about this place near Hebron which became Abram's more or less settled place of abode?
10. Name the Cities of the Plain. For what were they notorious?
11. What economic advantages were controlled by these cities in early times?
12. What geological and topographical changes evidently took place in this Plain of the Jordan probably about the beginning of the second millenium?

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13. Who were the kings who invaded from the East? What may have been the economic factor in this invasion?
14. What is a *midrash*? For what reasons must we reject this view of the Battle of the Kings and Abram's role in these events?
15. What route was taken by the invaders from the East? On what grounds do we accept this as historically valid?
16. How explain Abram's pursuit and victory with a force of 318 men? Was this his entire force? Who were his allies?
17. How account for the representation that the Dead Sea was not yet in existence?
18. What and where was the Salt Sea? The Valley of Siddim? What light has been thrown on this problem by Glueck's archaeological findings?
19. Identify as closely as possible the cities or kingdoms from which the Eastern kings came.
20. What peoples are mentioned as living along the highway by which the Eastern invaders came?
20. Who were the Anakim, the Horites, the Amalekites, the Amorites?
22. What was the result of the Battle of the Kings in the Vale of Siddim?
23. What was the fate of the King of Sodom and his allies? What did they and their armies do to escape destruction?
24. What further move did Lot make after pitching his tent *toward* Sodom?
25. What did this last move indicate as to Lot's spiritual state? How does the Apostle Peter describe Lot's attitude at this time?
26. Describe Abram's rescue of Lot. How far to the North did he go to effect the rescue?

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27. How reconcile the statements in verses 10 and 17 concerning the king of Sodom?
28. What was the King's Vale?
29. What two offices did Melchizedek hold? How does this typify Christ's ministry?
30. Explain "King of Salem," "Priest of God Most High."
31. Explain the significance of the name El Elyon.
32. Is there any reason for denying that a strain of Semitic monotheism had persisted from the beginning of the human race? What does Gen. 4:26 mean?
33. What similarity is indicated here between the God of Abraham and the God of Melchizedek?
34. What facts do we have confirming the historicity of this incident?
35. How does the writer of Hebrews describe Melchizedek, in ch. 7:2-3?
36. What is Milligan's interpretation of this ascription of timelessness to Melchizedek? What are the objections to this view?
37. What, according to John Owen, are the proofs of the greatness of Melchizedek?
38. What is indicated by Melchizedek's proffer of bread and wine? What is not indicated?
39. What is the significance of Melchizedek's twofold blessing?
40. What evidence is there to support the view that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Messiah Himself?
41. How explain the King of Sodom's "generosity" on this occasion?
42. What was Abram's reply to the King's offer?
43. What was Abram's oath and why did he make it?
44. What was signified by his lifting up his hand?
45. What gave Abram the right to appropriate a tenth of the spoils?



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46. What gave him the right to divert part of the spoils as repayment to his own and allied forces?
47. What relation does the content of ch. 14 bear to the history of God's Old Testament people?
48. What does Speiser say as to the general authenticity of this narrative?
49. What is Cornfeld's testimony as to the general authenticity of the Patriarchal narratives?
50. What is Albright's testimony about this matter? What is Nelson Glueck's testimony?
51. What usually happens to men who pitch their tents toward Sodom?
52. In what ways do men in all ages do this?
53. In what specific details was Melchizedek a type of Christ?
54. What does the writer of Hebrews tell us about the High Priesthood of Jesus?
55. What is the full significance of the titles Messiah, Christos, Christ?
56. Explain how Dispensations changed with changes of priesthood.
57. In what sense are all Christians priests unto God in the present Dispensation?
58. Explain how our Lord is priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.
59. How did the priesthood of the Jewish Dispensation differ from that of the Patriarchal Dispensation?
60. What are the three necessary qualifications for a priest?
61. Is there any authority in Scripture for a special priesthood in our Dispensation?
62. What does our Lord say about calling any man "Father" in a spiritual sense of the term? Who alone is addressed as "Holy Father" in the New Testament and where is the passage found in which this occurs?